

Before You Read

This selection also
appears in *Elements
of Literature*.

Three Skeleton Key by George G. Toudouze

LITERARY FOCUS: SUSPENSE AND FORESHADOWING

A “page turner” is an exciting book; you’re so eager to find out what happens that you read page after page, finding it hard to put the book down. One key ingredient in page turners is **suspense**—the feeling of uncertainty that propels you to keep reading. To create suspense, writers may create an eerie setting or withhold information from readers to keep you guessing.

To build suspense, writers sometimes plant clues in their stories. These clues hint at what might happen later. The use of such clues or hints is called **foreshadowing**.



READING SKILLS: MAKING PREDICTIONS

Which of the following types of predictions have you made recently: the outcome of a baseball game? which of your classmates will become class president? what inventions will come about over the next few years? Making predictions is part of participating in life. Likewise, you participate more fully in a story when you make predictions about it. To make predictions when you read:

- Pay attention to what the narrator tells you about story characters and their situations.
- Make predictions, or guesses, about what will happen.
- Read on to find out if your predictions were on target.

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills

Understand
suspense.

Reading Skills

Make predictions.

Vocabulary Skills

Clarify word
meanings by
using examples.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

PREVIEW SELECTION VOCABULARY

The following words appear in "Three Skeleton Key." Take time to preview these words before you begin the story.

hordes (hôrdz) *n.*: large, moving crowds.

The rats swam ashore in hordes.

receding (ri-sēd'īŋ) *v.* used as *adj.*: moving back.

At first the ship came toward us, but then it drifted off in the receding waters.

fathom (fath'əm) *v.*: understand.

The lighthouse keepers couldn't fathom the rats' nasty reaction.

edible (ed'ə-bəl) *adj.*: fit to be eaten.

The rats thought the men were edible.

derisive (di-rī'siv) *adj.*: scornful and ridiculing.

The rats peered with derisive eyes at the terrified men.

CLARIFYING WORD MEANINGS: EXAMPLES

Sometimes you can figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word by looking in the text for examples of what it is. Words and phrases, such as *for example*, *for instance*, *like*, *such as*, *in this case*, and *as if*, sometimes signal that an example will follow.

Read each passage below, and underline the example provided for each boldface word.

1. **Hordes** of people went to the concert. In this case, there were literally thousands of music lovers crowding the stadium.
2. We just could not **fathom** the reason for his actions. For example, the more we thought, the more we were puzzled.
3. The guest asked if the food was **edible**, as if the spaghetti and meatballs were going to poison her!

Three Skeleton Key

George G. Toudouze



PREDICT

Pause at line 4. What kind of story might this be?

WORD STUDY

Key (kē), in line 11, means “island.” The words *cay* and *quay* are alternate forms of *key*.

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 11–20. What **foreshadowing** clues does the writer give here? Circle them. What do those clues hint at?

My most terrifying experience? Well, one does have a few in thirty-five years of service in the Lights, although it’s mostly monotonous, routine work—keeping the light in order, making out the reports.

When I was a young man, not very long in the service, there was an opening in a lighthouse newly built off the coast of Guiana, on a small rock twenty miles or so from the mainland. The pay was high, so in order to reach the sum I had set out to save before I married, I volunteered for service in the new light.

Three Skeleton Key, the small rock on which the light stood, bore a bad reputation. It earned its name from the story of the three convicts who, escaping from Cayenne in a stolen dugout canoe, were wrecked on the rock during the night, managed to escape the sea, but eventually died of hunger and thirst. When they were discovered, nothing remained but three heaps of bones, picked clean by the birds. The story was that the three skeletons, gleaming with phosphorescent¹ light, danced over the small rock, screaming. . . .

But there are many such stories and I did not give the warnings of the old-timers at the *Île-de-Seine*² a second

1. **phosphorescent** (fäs’fə-res’ənt) *adj.*: glowing.
2. **Île-de-Seine** (ēl də sen’).

“Three Skeleton Key” by George G. Toudouze from *Esquire*, January 1937. Copyright 1937 by Hearst Communications, Inc. All rights reserved. *Esquire* is a trademark of Hearst Magazines Property, Inc. Reproduced by permission of *Esquire Magazine*.

Picture a gray, tapering cylinder,³ welded to the solid black rock by iron rods and concrete, rising from a small island twenty-odd miles from land. It lay in the midst of the sea, this island, a small, bare piece of stone, about one hundred fifty feet long, perhaps forty wide. Small, barely large enough for a man to walk about and stretch his legs at low tide.

This is an advantage one doesn't find in all lights, however, for some of them rise sheer from the waves, with no room for one to move save within the light itself. Still, on our island, one must be careful, for the rocks were treacherously smooth. One misstep and down you would fall into the sea—not that the risk of drowning was so great, but the waters about our island swarmed with huge sharks, who kept an eternal patrol around the base of the light.

3. **tapering cylinder:** tube shape that gradually narrows toward one end; in this case, toward the top.

Pause at line 39. What do you think might happen later in the story, based on the information you just read?

[illegible]

The verb *tend* means “take care of” or “look after.” Re-read the sentence containing the word *tenders*, in lines 54–57. What does *tenders* mean in this sentence?

[illegible]

Re-read lines 63–81, in which **suspense** begins to build. Underline the words and phrases that build suspense.

I had just returned from my leave at the end of June, that is to say, midwinter in that latitude, and had settled
60 down to the routine with my two fellow keepers, a Breton⁴ by the name of Le Gleo and the head keeper, Itchoua, a Basque⁵ some dozen years or so older than either of us.

Itchoua pointed, and following his finger, we saw a big
70 three-master, with all sail set, heading straight for the light.
A queer course, for the vessel must have seen us; our light
lit her with the glare of day each time it passed over her.

No wonder that we were surprised at seeing this three-master heading dead for us in the gloom of early morning. I
80 had immediately recognized her lines, for she stood out plainly, even at the distance of a mile, when our light shone on her.

4. **Breton** (bret'ɔ̃): person from Brittany, a region of northern France.
5. **Basque** (bask): Basques are people living in the Pyrenees, a mountain range in France and Spain.

Watching her sailing dead for us, a white wave boiling under her bows, Le Gleo cried out:

90 “What’s wrong with her crew? Are they all drunk or insane? Can’t they see us?”

Itchoua nodded soberly and looked at us sharply as he remarked: “See us? No doubt—if there *is* a crew aboard!”

“What do you mean, chief?” Le Gleo had started, turned to the Basque. “Are you saying that she’s the *Flying Dutchman*?”⁶

His sudden fright had been so evident that the older man laughed:

“No, old man, that’s not what I meant. If I say that no one’s aboard, I mean she’s a derelict.”⁷

100 Then we understood her queer behavior. Itchoua was right. For some reason, believing her doomed, her crew had abandoned her. Then she had righted herself and sailed on, wandering with the wind.

The three of us grew tense as the ship seemed about to crash on one of our numerous reefs, but she suddenly lurched with some change of the wind, the yards⁸ swung around, and the derelict came clumsily about and sailed dead away from us.

110 In the light of our lantern she seemed so sound, so strong, that Itchoua exclaimed impatiently:

“But why the devil was she abandoned? Nothing is smashed, no sign of fire—and she doesn’t sail as if she were taking water.”

Le Gleo waved to the departing ship:

“Bon voyage!” he smiled at Itchoua and went on. “She’s leaving us, chief, and now we’ll never know what—”

6. ***Flying Dutchman***: fabled Dutch ghost ship whose captain is said to be condemned to sail the seas until Judgment Day. Seeing the *Flying Dutchman* is supposed to bring bad luck.

7. **derelict** (der’ə·likt’) *n.*: here, abandoned ship.

8. **yards** *n.*: in nautical terms, rods fastened across the masts to support the sails.

INFER

Pause at line 90. What might have happened to the ship’s crew?

IDENTIFY

Skim lines 78–108, and circle the word *dead* each time it appears. What effect does this repetition have on you, the reader?

Pause at line 123. Throughout the story the writer speaks of the mysterious ship as if it were alive. In what way does this use of personification create **suspense**?

As if obeying his words, the derelict three-master stopped, came about, and headed for us once more. And for the next four hours the vessel played around us—
120 zigzagging, coming about, stopping, then suddenly lurching forward. No doubt some freak of current and wind, of which our island was the center, kept her near us.

The three of us focused our glasses on her poop¹⁰ and saw, standing out sharply, black letters on the white background of a life ring, the stenciled name “*Cornelius de Witt*, 130 *Rotterdam.*”

“Thunder!” cried Le Gleo, his Breton soul aching at seeing a fine ship doomed to smash upon a reef, “she’s going to pile up! She’s gone!”

There was nothing we could do but watch. A ship sailing with all sail spread, creaming the sea with her forefoot as she runs before the wind, is one of the most beautiful sights in the world—but this time I could feel the tears stinging in my eyes as I saw this fine ship headed for her doom.

10. **poop** *n.*: in nautical terms, the stern (back) deck of a ship.



All this time our glasses were riveted on her and we suddenly cried out together:

150 “The rats!”

Now we knew why this ship, in perfect condition, was sailing without her crew aboard. They had been driven out by the rats. Not those poor specimens of rats you see ashore, barely reaching the length of one foot from their trembling noses to the tip of their skinny tails, wretched creatures that dodge and hide at the mere sound of a footfall.

160 No, these were ships’ rats, huge, wise creatures, born on the sea, sailing all over the world on ships, transferring to other, larger ships as they multiply. There is as much difference between the rats of the land and these maritime rats as between a fishing smack¹¹ and an armored cruiser.

The rats of the sea are fierce, bold animals. Large, strong, and intelligent, clannish and seawise, able to put the best of mariners to shame with their knowledge of the sea, their uncanny ability to foretell the weather.

And they are brave, these rats, and vengeful. If you so much as harm one, his sharp cry will bring **hordes** of his fellows to swarm over you, tear you, and not cease until your flesh has been stripped from the bones.

VOCABULARY

hordes (hôrdz) *n.*: large, moving crowds.

PREDICT

Pause at line 169. Predict what role the rats may play later in the story.

11. **smack** *n.*: here, small sailboat.

Notes

CLARIFY

Re-read lines 180–187. What happened to the ship's crew?

170

The ones on this ship, the rats of Holland, are the worst, superior to other rats of the sea as their brethren are to the land rats. There is a well-known tale about these animals.

A Dutch captain, thinking to protect his cargo, brought aboard his ship not cats but two terriers, dogs trained in the hunting, fighting, and killing of vicious rats. By the time the ship, sailing from Rotterdam, had passed the Ostend light, the dogs were gone and never seen again. In twenty-four hours they had been overwhelmed, killed, and eaten by the rats.

180

At times, when the cargo does not suffice,¹² the rats attack the crew, either driving them from the ship or eating them alive. And studying the *Cornelius de Witt*, I turned sick, for her small boats were all in place. She had not been abandoned.

Over her bridge, on her deck, in the rigging, on every visible spot, the ship was a writhing mass—a starving army coming toward us aboard a vessel gone mad!

190

Our island was a small spot in that immense stretch of sea. The ship could have grazed us or passed to port or starboard with its ravening¹³ cargo—but no, she came for us at full speed, as if she were leading the regatta at a race, and impaled herself on a sharp point of rock.

There was a dull shock as her bottom stove in,¹⁴ then a horrible crackling as the three masts went overboard at once, as if cut down with one blow of some gigantic sickle. A sighing groan came as the water rushed into the ship; then she split in two and sank like a stone.

But the rats did not drown. Not these fellows! As much at home in the sea as any fish, they formed ranks in the

12. **suffice** (sə-fis') v.: provide enough.

13. **ravening** (rav'ə-niŋ) *adj.*: greedily searching for animals to kill for food. A more common related word is *ravenous* (rav'ə-nəs), meaning "wildly, greedily hungry."

14. **stove in**: caved in.

200 water, heads lifted, tails stretched out, paws paddling. And half of them, those from the forepart of the ship, sprang along the masts and onto the rocks in the instant before she sank. Before we had time even to move, nothing remained of the three-master save some pieces of wreckage floating on the surface and an army of rats covering the rocks left bare by the **receding** tide.

Thousands of heads rose, felt the wind, and we were scented, seen! To them we were fresh meat, after possible weeks of starving. There came a scream, composed of innumerable screams, sharper than the howl of a saw attacking
210 a bar of iron, and in the one motion, every rat leaped to attack the tower!

We barely had time to leap back, close the door leading onto the gallery, descend the stairs, and shut every window tightly. Luckily the door at the base of the light, which we never could have reached in time, was of bronze set in granite and was tightly closed.

The horrible band, in no measurable time, had swarmed up and over the tower as if it had been a tree, piled on the
220 embrasures¹⁵ of the windows, scraped at the glass with thousands of claws, covered the lighthouse with a furry mantle, and reached the top of the tower, filling the gallery and piling atop the lantern.

Their teeth grated as they pressed against the glass of the lantern room, where they could plainly see us, though they could not reach us. A few millimeters of glass, luckily very strong, separated our faces from their gleaming, beady eyes, their sharp claws and teeth. Their odor filled the tower, poisoned our lungs, and rasped our nostrils with a
230 pestilential, nauseating smell. And there we were, sealed alive in our own light, prisoners of a horde of starving rats.

VOCABULARY

receding (ri-sēd'īŋ) *v.* used as *adj.*: moving back.

IDENTIFY

Pause at line 212. What has just happened to increase your feeling of **suspense**?

INTERPRET

Underline the words and phrases in lines 224–231 that appeal to your senses of sight, smell, and hearing. Why might the writer have chosen to describe the rats in such detail?

15. **embrasures** (em-brā'zhərz) *n.*: slanted openings.

Notes

Read the boxed passage aloud several times. The first time read slowly, for sense. Then, experiment with the tone of your voice and its volume to bring the vivid passage to life for your listeners. Note: The letter combination of *ph* in *phosphorescent* is pronounced "f".

VOCABULARY

fathom (fəθ'əm) *v.*: understand; get to the bottom of.

Fathom is also a noun meaning "a length of six feet." A fathom is a unit of measure for depth of water.

That first night, the tension was so great that we could not sleep. Every moment, we felt that some opening had been made, some window given way, and that our horrible besiegers were pouring through the breach. The rising tide, chasing those of the rats which had stayed on the bare rocks, increased the numbers clinging to the walls, piled on the balcony—so much so that clusters of rats clinging to one another hung from the lantern and the gallery.

240 With the coming of darkness we lit the light and the turning beam completely maddened the beasts. As the light turned, it successively blinded thousands of rats crowded against the glass, while the dark side of the lantern room gleamed with thousands of points of light, burning like the eyes of jungle beasts in the night.

250 All the while we could hear the enraged scraping of claws against the stone and glass, while the chorus of cries was so loud that we had to shout to hear one another. From time to time, some of the rats fought among themselves and a dark cluster would detach itself, falling into the sea like a ripe fruit from a tree. Then we would see phosphorescent streaks as triangular fins slashed the water—sharks, permanent guardians of our rock, feasting on our jailers.

The next day we were calmer and amused ourselves teasing the rats, placing our faces against the glass which separated us. They could not **fathom** the invisible barrier which separated them from us, and we laughed as we watched them leaping against the heavy glass.

260 But the day after that, we realized how serious our position was. The air was foul; even the heavy smell of oil within our stronghold could not dominate the fetid odor of the beasts massed around us. And there was no way of admitting fresh air without also admitting the rats.

The morning of the fourth day, at early dawn, I saw the wooden framework of my window, eaten away from the outside, sagging inwards. I called my comrades and the three of us fastened a sheet of tin in the opening, sealing it tightly. When we had completed that task, Itchoua turned to us and said dully:

270 “Well—the supply boat came thirteen days ago, and she won’t be back for twenty-nine.” He pointed at the white metal plate sealing the opening through the granite. “If that gives way”—he shrugged—“they can change the name of this place to Six Skeleton Key.”

The next six days and seven nights, our only distraction was watching the rats whose holds were insecure fall a hundred and twenty feet into the maws of the sharks—but they were so many that we could not see any diminution in their numbers.

280 Thinking to calm ourselves and pass the time, we attempted to count them, but we soon gave up. They moved incessantly, never still. Then we tried identifying them, naming them.



Stephen Dalton/Photo Researchers.

PREDICT

Pause at line 274. Do you think the three lighthouse keepers will die? Will they change the name of the island to Six Skeleton Key? Explain.

WORD STUDY

Re-read the sentence in lines 281–282, and look for a context clue that helps you define *incessantly*. Underline the clue. What does *incessantly* mean?

Notes

WORD STUDY

The word *maniacal* in line 297 is used to describe Le Gleo's wild descriptions of his nightmares. *Maniacal* (mə-nī'ə-kəl) is built on the noun *maniac*.

One of them, larger than the others, who seemed to lead them in their rushes against the glass separating us, we named "Nero";¹⁶ and there were several others whom we had learned to distinguish through various peculiarities.

But the thought of our bones joining those of the convicts was always in the back of our minds. And the gloom
290 of our prison fed these thoughts, for the interior of the light was almost completely dark, as we had had to seal every window in the same fashion as mine, and the only space that still admitted daylight was the glassed-in lantern room at the very top of the tower.

Then Le Gleo became morose and had nightmares in which he would see the three skeletons dancing around him, gleaming coldly, seeking to grasp him. His maniacal, raving descriptions were so vivid that Itchoua and I began seeing them also.

300 It was a living nightmare, the raging cries of the rats as they swarmed over the light, mad with hunger; the sickening, strangling odor of their bodies—

True, there is a way of signaling from lighthouses. But to reach the mast on which to hang the signal, we would have to go out on the gallery where the rats were.

There was only one thing left to do. After debating all of the ninth day, we decided not to light the lantern that night. This is the greatest breach of our service, never committed as long as the tenders of the light are alive; for the
310 light is something sacred, warning ships of danger in the night. Either the light gleams a quarter-hour after sundown, or no one is left alive to light it.

Well, that night, Three Skeleton Light was dark, and all the men were alive. At the risk of causing ships to crash on our reefs, we left it unlit, for we were worn out—going mad!

16. Nero (nir'ō): emperor of Rome (A.D. 54–68) known for his cruelty.

At two in the morning, while Itchoua was dozing in his room, the sheet of metal sealing his window gave way. The chief had just time enough to leap to his feet and cry for help, the rats swarming over him.

320 But Le Gleo and I, who had been watching from the lantern room, got to him immediately, and the three of us battled with the horde of maddened rats which flowed through the gaping window. They bit, we struck them down with our knives—and retreated.

We locked the door of the room on them, but before we had time to bind our wounds, the door was eaten through and gave way, and we retreated up the stairs, fighting off the rats that leaped on us from the knee-deep swarm.

330 I do not remember, to this day, how we ever managed to escape. All I can remember is wading through them up the stairs, striking them off as they swarmed over us; and then we found ourselves, bleeding from innumerable bites, our clothes shredded, sprawled across the trapdoor in the floor of the lantern room—without food or drink. Luckily, the trapdoor was metal, set into the granite with iron bolts.

The rats occupied the entire light beneath us, and on the floor of our retreat lay some twenty of their fellows, who had gotten in with us before the trapdoor closed and whom we had killed with our knives. Below us, in the tower, we could hear the screams of the rats as they devoured everything **edible** that they found. Those on the outside squealed in reply and writhed in a horrible curtain as they stared at us through the glass of the lantern room.

Itchoua sat up and stared silently at his blood trickling from the wounds on his limbs and body and running in thin streams on the floor around him. Le Gleo, who was in as bad a state (and so was I, for that matter), stared at

PREDICT

Pause at line 319. The window that had been keeping the rats out just gave way. What will happen next?

IDENTIFY

In lines 320–329, the **suspense** builds. What unanswered question is going through your mind at this point?

VOCABULARY

edible (ed'ə-bəl) *adj.*: fit to be eaten.

Notes

CLARIFY

Re-read lines 363–378. Why didn't the officers on the patrol ship stay and rescue the keepers?

the chief and me vacantly, started as his gaze swung to the
350 multitude of rats against the glass, then suddenly began
laughing horribly:

“Hee! Hee! The Three Skeletons! Hee! Hee! The Three
Skeletons are now *six* skeletons! *Six* skeletons!”

He threw his head back and howled, his eyes glazed, a
trickle of saliva running from the corners of his mouth and
thinning the blood flowing over his chest. I shouted to him
to shut up, but he did not hear me, so I did the only thing
I could to quiet him—I swung the back of my hand across
his face.

360 The howling stopped suddenly, and his eyes swung
around the room; then he bowed his head and began weep-
ing softly, like a child.

Our darkened light had been noticed from the main-
land, and as dawn was breaking, the patrol was there to
investigate the failure of our light. Looking through my
binoculars, I could see the horrified expression on the faces
of the officers and crew when, the daylight strengthening,
they saw the light completely covered by a seething mass of
rats. They thought, as I afterwards found out, that we had
370 been eaten alive.

But the rats had also seen the ship or had scented the
crew. As the ship drew nearer, a solid phalanx¹⁷ left the
light, plunged into the water, and swimming out, attempted
to board her. They would have succeeded, as the ship was
hove to;¹⁸ but the engineer connected his steam to a hose
on the deck and scalded the head of the attacking column,
which slowed them up long enough for the ship to get
under way and leave the rats behind.

380 Then the sharks took part. Belly up, mouths gaping,
they arrived in swarms and scooped up the rats, sweeping

17. **phalanx** (fā'lanx's) *n.*: closely packed group. A phalanx is an ancient military formation, and the word still has warlike connotations.

18. **hove to**: stopped by being turned into the wind.



through them like a sickle through wheat. That was one day that sharks really served a useful purpose.

The remaining rats turned tail, swam to the shore, and emerged dripping. As they neared the light, their comrades greeted them with shrill cries, with what sounded like a **derisive** note predominating. They answered angrily and mingled with their fellows. From the several tussles that broke out, it seemed as if they resented being ridiculed for their failure to capture the ship.

390 But all this did nothing to get us out of our jail. The small ship could not approach but steamed around the light at a safe distance, and the tower must have seemed fantastic, some weird, many-mouthed beast hurling defiance at them.

Finally, seeing the rats running in and out of the tower through the door and the windows, those on the ship decided that we had perished and were about to leave when Itchoua, regaining his senses, thought of using the light as a signal. He lit it and, using a plank placed and withdrawn before the

Notes

VOCABULARY

derisive (di-rī'siv) *adj.*: scornful and ridiculing.

CLARIFY

Re-read lines 399–401. What does Itchoua do to signal that he and the other keepers are still alive?

RETELL

What's happening in lines 416–426?

400 beam to form the dots and dashes, quickly sent out our story to those on the vessel.

Our reply came quickly. When they understood our position—how we could not get rid of the rats, Le Gleo's mind going fast, Itchoua and myself covered with bites, cornered in the lantern room without food or water—they had a signalman send us their reply.

His arms swinging like those of a windmill, he quickly spelled out:

410 “Don’t give up, hang on a little longer! We’ll get you out of this!”

Then she turned and steamed at top speed for the coast, leaving us little reassured.

She was back at noon, accompanied by the supply ship, two small coast guard boats, and the fireboat—a small squadron. At twelve-thirty the battle was on.

420 After a short reconnaissance,¹⁹ the fireboat picked her way slowly through the reefs until she was close to us, then turned her powerful jet of water on the rats. The heavy stream tore the rats from their places and hurled them screaming into the water, where the sharks gulped them down. But for every ten that were dislodged, seven swam ashore, and the stream could do nothing to the rats within the tower. Furthermore, some of them, instead of returning to the rocks, boarded the fireboat, and the men were forced to battle them hand to hand. They were true rats of Holland, fearing no man, fighting for the right to live!

430 Nightfall came, and it was as if nothing had been done; the rats were still in possession. One of the patrol boats stayed by the island; the rest of the flotilla²⁰ departed for the coast. We had to spend another night in our prison. Le Gleo was sitting on the floor, babbling about skeletons,

19. **reconnaissance** (ri-kän'ə-səns) *n.*: exploratory survey or examination.

20. **flotilla** (flō-til'ə) *n.*: small fleet of boats.

and as I turned to Itchoua, he fell unconscious from his wounds. I was in no better shape and could feel my blood flaming with fever.

Somehow the night dragged by, and the next afternoon I saw a tug, accompanied by the fireboat, come from the mainland with a huge barge in tow. Through my glasses, I saw that the barge was filled with meat.

440 Risking the treacherous reefs, the tug dragged the barge as close to the island as possible. To the last rat, our besiegers deserted the rock, swam out, and boarded the barge reeking with the scent of freshly cut meat. The tug dragged the barge about a mile from shore, where the fireboat drenched the barge with gasoline. A well-placed incendiary shell from the patrol boat set her on fire.

The barge was covered with flames immediately, and the rats took to the water in swarms, but the patrol boat bombarded them with shrapnel from a safe distance, and the sharks finished off the survivors.

450 A whaleboat from the patrol boat took us off the island and left three men to replace us. By nightfall we were in the hospital in Cayenne. What became of my friends?

Well, Le Gleo's mind had cracked and he was raving mad. They sent him back to France and locked him up in an asylum, the poor devil! Itchoua died within a week; a rat's bite is dangerous in that hot, humid climate, and infection sets in rapidly.

460 As for me—when they fumigated the light and repaired the damage done by the rats, I resumed my service there. Why not? No reason why such an incident should keep me from finishing out my service there, is there?

Besides—I told you I liked the place—to be truthful, I've never had a post as pleasant as that one, and when my time came to leave it forever, I tell you that I almost wept as Three Skeleton Key disappeared below the horizon.

PREDICT

Pause at line 438. What will the rescuers do with the barge loaded with meat?

CONNECT

In lines 453–460, we find out what happened to the three men following the incident. Were any of your predictions on target? Explain.

Three Skeleton Key

**SKILLS
FOCUS**

Literary Skills

Analyze the use of suspense and foreshadowing.

Steps to Suspense To create suspense, writers may create eerie settings, drop hints about possible story outcomes, and introduce exciting plot complications. Skim through “Three Skeleton Key” and the notes you took. Then, on the steps below, describe ways George G. Toudouze, the story’s writer, kept you in suspense.

Step 5:

Step 4:

Step 3:

Step 2:

Step 1:

Skills Review

Three Skeleton Key

VOCABULARY AND COMPREHENSION

A. Clarifying Word Meanings: Examples Choose three words from the Word Bank. Then, write a sentence or two in which you give an example of each.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Word Bank

hordes
receding
fathom
edible
derisive

B. Reading Comprehension Answer each question below.

1. Where does the story take place? _____

2. How do the rats get onto the island? _____

3. How do the rescuers get the rats away from the lighthouse? _____



Vocabulary Skills
Clarify word meanings by using examples.

for smashing the other eggs that she will never give up trying to kill him. Other students will say she will go away because she now fears Rikki, she has no husband to help her, her plan has failed, and she wants above all to keep the last of her eggs.

Page 24

RETELL

Possible list for retelling:

Nagaina grabs the egg and runs for her life.
Darzee's wife flaps her wings around Nagaina and manages to delay her.
Nagaina dashes into a rat hole where she used to live.
Rikki holds on to Nagaina's tail and goes down the hole with her.

PREDICT

Predictions will vary. Some students will agree with Darzee that Rikki must be dead because Nagaina knows her underground hole better than he does; she has probably found a place to turn and strike him, and even wise, old mongooses don't follow cobras into their holes. Other students will say that Rikki can't be dead because he has been successful and lucky in past battles. He is too brave and smart to die like this.

Page 25

INFER

Possible responses: The egg got smashed in the fight, or Rikki smashed the egg after the fight. A few students may say there is no evidence that the egg was smashed; Rikki doesn't mention the egg, so he may have forgotten it. A young cobra may one day come out to fight Rikki for control of the garden.

Page 26

INTERPRET

Possible responses: Rikki knows that other cobras may move into the garden, so he must never get too proud and let down his guard. A mongoose that is too proud might be foolish enough to believe that nothing will ever again threaten him.

Page 27

IDENTIFY

The words in Darzee's chant show that he is grateful to Rikki.

EXTEND

Possible responses: Rikki might have said, "Enough of that!" or "You're being silly again."

■ Possible Answers to Skills Practice

Conflict Diagram (page 28)

- Basic Situation**—Rikki, a mongoose, becomes the pet of a family that has a garden with snakes in it.
Event/Conflict—Rikki fights Nagaina, but he doesn't hold on long enough.
Event/Conflict—Rikki fights and kills Karait.
Event/Conflict—Rikki kills Nag.
Event/Conflict—Rikki tricks Nagaina and distracts her from striking Teddy.
Climax/Final Conflict—Rikki kills Nagaina inside the rat hole.
Resolution—Teddy's family shows their gratitude to Rikki for saving their lives. Darzee makes up a song praising Rikki.

■ Possible Answers to Skills Review

Vocabulary and Comprehension (page 29)

- A.** 1. **Sample:** The word *immensely* does not mean "a little" or "a small amount."
2. **Sample:** The word *cowered* does not mean "stood boldly in the open."
3. **Sample:** The word *valiant* does not mean "timid" or "easily frightened."
- B.** 1. A flood washes Rikki out of his burrow. The family rescues him and allows him the run of the house and garden.
2. Nag and Nagaina enter the house to kill the family who lives there. They reason that when the people are gone, Rikki-tikki-tavi will leave too. Then they can have the garden to themselves again.
3. Rikki distracts Nagaina as she threatens Teddy. He tells her he's the one who killed Nag. He says there is only one egg left. She grabs the egg and runs with it. Rikki follows and kills her.

Three Skeleton Key, page 30

Vocabulary Development (page 31)

- Hordes** of people went to the concert. In this case, there were literally thousands of music lovers crowding the stadium.
- We just could not fathom the reason for his actions. For example, the more we thought, the more we were puzzled.
- The guest asked if the food was **edible**, as if the spaghetti and meatballs were going to poison her!

Page 32

PREDICT

Answers will vary. Possible responses: The first sentence makes you think it might be a horror story; it might be an adventure story.

IDENTIFY

Answers will vary. Students may circle the following: “bad reputation”; “eventually died”; “nothing remained . . . bones.” The clues hint at possible danger.

Page 33

PREDICT

Answers will vary. Possible response: Someone is going to fall into the sea and be eaten by sharks.

Page 34

WORD STUDY

The tenders are people who tend, or look after, the lighthouse.

IDENTIFY

Answers will vary. The following passage builds suspense: “Itchoua pointed, and following his finger, we saw a big three-master, with all sail set, heading straight for the light. A queer course, for the vessel must have seen us.”

Page 35

INFER

Possible responses: The crew might have been killed by pirates; the crew might have abandoned the ship for some reason.

IDENTIFY

Answers will vary. Possible response: Although *dead* is used in this context to mean “straight,” the word’s repetition makes you think that the ship’s crew is probably dead.

Page 36

INTERPRET

Answers will vary. Possible response: The writer creates suspense by making you wonder what force is guiding the mysterious ship. The ship seems to be alive, but there is no sign of life on it.

Page 37

PREDICT

Predictions will vary. Possible responses: The rats may kill one or two of the men; the rats may break into the lighthouse and eat all the food; the rats may fall into the sea and be eaten by the sharks.

Page 38

CLARIFY

The small boats were still on the ship, so the crew hadn’t escaped. The rats attacked the ship’s crew, eating them alive.

Page 39

IDENTIFY

The rats have smelled and seen the men, and they’re attacking the lighthouse tower.

INTERPRET

Students may underline the following words and phrases: “teeth grated”; “pressed against the glass”; “gleaming, beady eyes, their sharp claws and teeth”; “Their odor . . . nauseating smell”; “sealed alive.” The writer’s use of detail makes the horror of the situation seem realistic.

Page 41

PREDICT

Since the narrator was one of the lighthouse keepers, they can’t have all died. The name of the island won’t be changed to Six Skeleton Key.

WORD STUDY

Students should underline “never still” as the context clue for *incessantly*. The word *incessantly* means “without ceasing” or “never stopping.”

Page 43

PREDICT

Predictions will vary. Possible responses: The rats may eat Itchoua alive, just as they did the ship’s crew; the other two men will kill the rats and save Itchoua.

IDENTIFY

Answers will vary. Possible responses: Were they able to save Itchoua, or did he get eaten by the rats? Now that the rats are in the lighthouse with them, how will they escape?

Page 44

CLARIFY

The patrol ship didn’t stay and rescue the keepers because the officers and crew thought the keepers must have been killed by the rats. Also, many of the rats jumped into the sea and began to climb aboard the patrol ship.

Page 46

CLARIFY

Itchoua lights the lighthouse beacon. Then, by placing and withdrawing a plank before the beam, he signals to the rescuers.

RETELL

The rescuers have brought a fireboat back to attack the rats. The fireboat is spraying a jet of water at the tower, knocking the rats into the sea. Many of the rats are being eaten by sharks, but some are returning to the island, and others are attacking the fireboat.

Page 47

PREDICT

Predictions will vary. Possible response: The rescuers will use the barge loaded with meat to attract the rats. Then they'll kill the rats somehow.

CONNECT

Responses will vary.

■ Possible Answers to Skills Practice

Steps to Suspense (page 48)

- Step 1:** The first sentence makes you wonder what the writer's terrifying experience was.
- Step 2:** The writer tells a story about three men who died on the island.
- Step 3:** The writer describes a ship as being almost alive.
- Step 4:** A rescue ship arrives but then leaves.
- Step 5:** Nothing seems to stop the rats from their attack.

■ Possible Answers to Skills Review

Vocabulary and Comprehension (page 49)

- A.**
- Sample:** The tide was receding quickly, as if running away from something it feared on the beach.
 - Sample:** There are some things I just can't fathom; for example, I don't understand why our dog doesn't like our cat.
 - Sample:** The salesperson spoke about the cheaper mountain bike in a derisive way. He criticized the quality of its parts.
- B.**
- The story takes place in a lighthouse on a small island about twenty miles off the coast of Guiana.
 - The rats are on a ship that crashes into the island.
 - The rescuers lure the rats to a barge full of fresh meat. Then they set the barge on fire to kill the rats.

The Monkey and the Crocodile, page 50

Page 52

DECODING TIP

The two words in *plentiful* are *plenty* and *ful(l)*.

Page 53

IDENTIFY

The crocodile's wife wants to eat the heart of the crocodile's friend, the monkey.

Page 54

PREDICT

Predictions will vary. Possible responses: The crocodile won't kill the monkey because the monkey has been too nice to him; the crocodile's wife may die somehow because she is so mean; the monkey will be killed because he was foolish enough to befriend a crocodile; the monkey will somehow trick the crocodile so that he doesn't get killed.

Page 55

RETELL

The monkey tricks the crocodile into believing that he left his heart in the tree. The crocodile takes the monkey back to the tree to get the monkey's heart, and the monkey climbs up the tree to safety.

■ Possible Answers to Skills Practice

Plot Storyboard (page 56)

Answers will vary. Possible storyboard frames: (1) Monkey in a tree throwing rose-apples down to the crocodile. (2) Crocodile giving rose-apples to his wife. (3) Crocodile's wife with a wicked grin and gleam in her eye thinking about eating the monkey's heart. (4) Crocodile's wife sulking with arms folded, threatening to starve herself. (5) Crocodile swimming in river with monkey on his back. Monkey's arms are full of rose-apples. (6) Monkey climbing back up the tree with a playful grin on his face.

■ Possible Answers to Skills Review

Vocabulary and Comprehension (page 57)

- A.**
- The crocodile's wife **sulked** when she didn't get her way. When his wife looked unhappy, the crocodile always got nervous.
 - The delicious rose-apples were eaten by the animals with **relish**, with great enjoyment.
 - The monkey quickly **clambered** up his tree to safety. His awkward climbing method—using both his hands and feet—delighted the watching children.